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ABSTRACT

Because the vitality of libraries as educational agencies depends on wise actions by public decision makers and others who provide resources to educational institutions, the American Library Association has identified four realities for effective educational reform within a learning society: (1) learning begins before schooling, (2) good schools require good school libraries, (3) people in a learning society need libraries throughout their lives, and (4) public support of libraries is an investment in people and communities. Much public attention is focused on recommendations for changes in elementary and secondary schools. Yet, as "A Nation at Risk" clearly states, proposals for educational reform must recognize the need for lifelong learning. Libraries are an essential part of lifelong learning, and all people in a learning society deserve access to good library service. Within the last year more than half the state legislatures have increased state aid for schools, and over half have raised high school graduation requirements. States and communities have established uncounted commissions, committees, and task forces to examine and improve their schools. Attention to elementary and secondary schools constitutes an important beginning. However, with few exceptions, recognition of the value of libraries is missing from these educational reform efforts. Now it is essential to recognize these four realities of educational reform and act on them. (DMC)

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REALITIES:

Educational Reform in a Learning Society

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A statement by the American Library Association Task Force on Excellence in Education

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The Learning Society

"In a world of ever-accelerating competition and change in the conditions of the workplace, of ever-greater danger, and of ever-larger opportunities for those prepared to meet them, educational reform should focus on the goal of creating a Learning Society. At the heart of such a society is the commitment to a set of values and to a system of education that affords all members the opportunity to stretch their minds to full capacity, from early childhood through adulthood, learning more as the world itself changes. Such a society has as a basic foundation the idea that education is important not only because of what it contributes to one's career goals but also because of the value it adds to the general quality of one's life. Also at the heart of the Learning Society are educational opportunities extending far beyond the traditional institutions of learning, our schools and colleges. They extend into homes and workplaces; into libraries, art galleries, museums, and science centers; indeed, into every place where the individual can develop and mature in work and life. In our view, formal schooling in youth is the essential foundation for learning throughout one's life. But without life-long learning, one's skills will become rapidly dated."

—— ***A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform.*** *A Report to the Nation and the Secretary of Education, United States Department of Education by The National Commission on Excellence in Education. 1983.*

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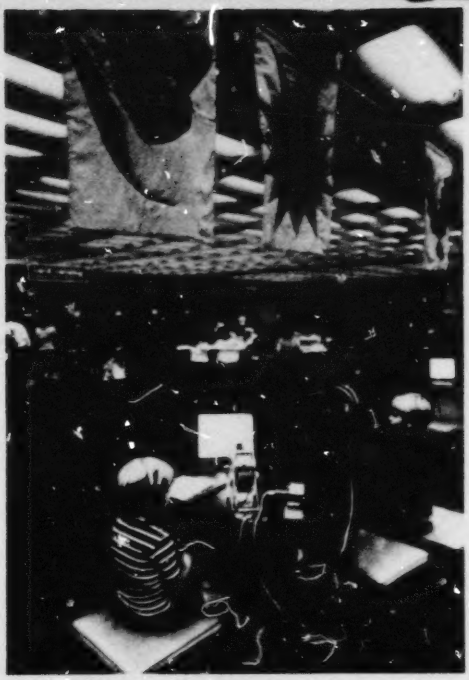
The Four Realities

The way in which our American public schools are educating young people for a life of social and technological change is the focus of reports, recommendations, debate, political discussion, and public concern. In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education reported its assessment and recommendations in the publication *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. The 1984 political campaigns show that this concern is shared by people in every state and territory.

Much public attention is focused on recommendations for changes in elementary and secondary schools. Yet, as *A Nation at Risk* clearly states, proposals for educational reform must recognize the need for life-long learning. Libraries are an essential part of life-long learning. The autobiographies and reminiscences of public leaders and other achievers document the ways in which libraries have influenced their lives. All people in a learning society deserve access to good library service.

The vitality of libraries as educational agencies depends on wise actions by public decision makers and others who provide resources to educational institutions. The American Library Association identifies four realities for effective educational reform within a learning society. The four realities are:

1. **Learning begins before schooling.**
2. **Good schools require good school libraries.**
3. **People in a learning society need libraries throughout their lives.**
4. **Public support of libraries is an investment in people and communities.**



Reality #1: Learning Begins Before Schooling

The extent to which parents introduce their children to books, culture, and learning affects children throughout life. *A Nation at Risk* points out to parents:

> *As surely as you are your child's first and most influential teacher, your child's ideas about education and its significance begin with you. You must be a living example of what you expect your children to honor and emulate. Moreover, you bear a responsibility to participate actively in your child's education. You should . . . nurture your child's curiosity, creativity and confidence. . . . Above all, exhibit a commitment to continued learning in your own life.*

Research shows that children who have been exposed to reading and other cultural experiences before they begin school have a better chance of success in formal learning than those who do not have this experience. Among the most important of the preschool experiences are the development of skills in listening, speaking, and looking that prepare for reading and form the basis for the enjoyment of learning. In our society, most parents work outside the home, so all members of the family and extended family (including grandparents and brothers and sisters) can play important educational roles. Family members set the stage for reading and other learning and provide models of behavior. This family influence in developing attitudes toward learning (often extended by collaboration with day care,

preschool, and other community agencies) is important for the prevention of deficiencies in school and beyond. Libraries contribute to preschool learning in two ways: through the services, programs, and materials that help parents increase their skills and capabilities, and through programs that serve children directly.

Library service to parents and day care staff supports preschool learning in a variety of ways. Libraries provide books for adults to read aloud to children. Groups of children in child care and day care centers and in public libraries listen to stories and act them out. Children borrow books and records from libraries. Toddler programs that bring very small children and their parents to the library together provide a basis for later, more independent use of libraries by children as they grow older.

All these experiences for young children require action by motivated, enthusiastic adults--adults who will instill a love of reading. Parents, volunteers, and day care center staff learn from librarians how to select and use materials with children. Librarians have the skills, experience, and desire to conduct workshops for parents, older children, babysitters, early childhood specialists, teachers, and volunteers. The library has information to help parents face problems which they face daily. In some communities, multilanguage collections for parents and preschoolers are essential. Through libraries, parents can learn how to use television and newer technology, such as computers, to nurture children's creativity and confidence.

Librarians also help create community coalitions of school personnel, public librarians, members of parent-teacher groups, and others concerned with preschool learning. Public library staff who provide information and referral services help parents develop effective partnerships with schools, preschools, day care centers, and other early childhood agencies.

Unfortunately, limited funds in many of our public libraries have caused cutbacks in children's services. Day-to-day realities of operating and staffing public libraries result in the lack of a full-time children's librarian in many libraries and branches. Because of limited library staff, parents and preschool children may wait months before being able to participate in a storyhour program.

To ensure that children and their parents have library services for effective preschool learning, public officials should:

- **Appropriate funds for parent education and early childhood services in public libraries, particularly those which demonstrate outreach and which promote cooperation with other educational and community agencies.**
- **Establish state and federal regulations for preschool day care services which mandate book and library resources as part of the basic program requirements.**

Reality #2: Good Schools Require Good School Libraries

Good schools enable students to acquire and use knowledge, to experience and enjoy discovery and learning, to understand themselves and other people, to develop lifelong learning skills, and to function productively in a democratic society. Libraries are essential to each of these tasks. In libraries, students learn how to locate, organize, and use information that will expand their horizons and raise their self expectations. Librarians are teachers, and they serve both students and teachers.

As students develop library skills in finding information, they seek more information, compare and evaluate sources and opinions, and develop critical thinking. These skills, which should be part of every school's curriculum, can be learned in school libraries.

School libraries serve as learner-oriented laboratories which support, extend, and individualize the school's curriculum. A California research study demonstrated that students with library experience achieved higher level language skills than those without this experience. In Virginia, a study proved that students who combined independent study with extensive library use under a librarian's supervision attained higher verbal scholastic aptitude test scores than students who used libraries only incidentally.

A Nation at Risk points out the limitations of textbooks. Well-stocked school libraries offer a diversity of books and other materials for students of all abilities, including the most gifted. Librarians have an essential educational role in helping teachers and students choose materials for class work and independent study.

Today's libraries are adding access to computer databases to their information resources. School librarians should be involved in the development of these databases to assure that they will be appropriate for the maturity, interests, and ability levels of students. These new resources should be available to students in elementary schools as well as in high schools.

A Nation at Risk says that the elementary years "should foster an enthusiasm for learning and the development of the individual's gifts and talents." This describes what occurs when elementary school children develop early and lasting pleasures in using libraries. In Indiana, a study showed that reading skills, verbal expression, and library skills were significantly greater in an elementary school after library services were increased. Disadvantaged children in Boston increased their skills in verbal expression of ideas and their language ability after twelve weekly one-hour library programs with books and storytelling.

Access to a library for quick fact-finding and sustained work on a project should be among the rights of every child and young person. The student who encounters a librarian who is directly involved in teaching has access to a much wider world than that of a single classroom. The librarian, at successive grade levels, introduces literature and teaches research study skills. From the librarian a student learns how to locate, interpret, and present information. The librarian teaches classes as part of the instructional program, supplements classroom study with appropriate presentations on research, gives book talks, and instructs in computer use. When the school librarian helps design curriculum, both teachers and students benefit. In every school, therefore, librarians should be included as members of curriculum design and review committees. They should also be involved as planners, providers, and participants in inservice training programs for teachers.

Too many of the 105,000 schools in the United States have inadequate school libraries because they lack the staff, materials, space, and services required by students and their teachers. Even many of the schools that have library materials provide few library services because they lack professional librarians. Almost three million pupils (seven percent of the total) attend public schools without a school library. In 1982, our country had only one school librarian for every 954 students. This is the equivalent of an average of only twenty seconds a day for each student.

The lack of librarians is especially severe in elementary schools. For example, in Los Angeles, our country's second largest city, in only twenty of the city's 450 elementary schools is there a full-time librarian. Furthermore, in the last decade, the number of school library supervisory and consulting staff at state and district levels has declined sharply.

In *A Nation at Risk*, the National Commission on Excellence in Education recommends higher educational standards and expectations, increased time for learning, and increased attention to English, mathematics, science, social studies, computer science, and foreign languages. To achieve these requirements, school libraries must be stronger. Librarians, who are less bound by curriculum sequences than classroom teachers, can improve performance of students in every grade, in every subject, and at every level of ability.

To ensure that every child has access to the quality of school library service needed in a learning society, public officials should:

- **Require that library research and information skills be taught as a new basic—providing instruction within the library program and in all subject areas at each level of elementary and secondary school.**
- **Establish more specific state standards for school libraries.**
- **Require school superintendents, boards, parents, teachers, and other interested people in every community to prepare a plan for developing school library resources, for using these resources effectively, and for coordinating services with public libraries in the community.**
- **Supply sufficient funds for school library programs so there are staff to coordinate the teaching of research and study skills in cooperation with teachers of English, social studies, science, mathematics, and other subjects.**
- **Provide funds for sufficient library books, audiovisual materials, magazines, computer software, and other materials to support teaching and learning and to permit participation by school libraries in library networks for sharing of resources.**
- **Earmark state educational funds for school library resources and program development.**
- **Ensure that each state education department has skilled school library media supervisory staff to provide needed statewide professional leadership.**
- **Require colleges and universities to provide future teachers with training in using libraries and library materials.**
- **Require that education programs for school administrators and other education specialists include training in the administration and supervision of school libraries.**
- **Target federal education funds to specific school library resource development programs, including those that use the new technologies and those that demonstrate exemplary services.**

Reality #3: People in a Learning Society Need Libraries throughout Their Lives

A learning society is committed to ongoing educational growth for everyone and provides each individual with a choice among formal and informal providers of education. Science has lengthened our life spans, but we need a learning society to allow each of us to benefit fully from the biological gain of years. Each person requires the challenge of new ideas and new concepts in order to grow and develop throughout adulthood.

Our society is characterized by a ceaseless search for solutions to the critical problems that threaten our survival in this age of continuing change. Our learning society is also an information-based society. Each person needs the means to cope with the magnitude of data currently being generated.

Learning can take place in many settings. For millions of Americans, libraries are centers of learning. College and university libraries help learners of many ages who are enrolled in formal education. Educationally disadvantaged college students require remediation and library instruction so they can make the best use of library resources to develop their study skills. Corporate, government, and union libraries help people continue learning in a work-place setting. The public library is a learning center for all.

Through access to the ideas of the past and present, we gain the perspective essential for innovation. Inherent in the creation of all new knowledge, and its application, is the existence of a mechanism to collect, sift, organize, and distribute the products of a learning society. The mechanism that best responds to this need is the library. The library, therefore, must be free from restrictions which interfere with access to information.

New technology offers new formats for information and new ways of delivering information. Individuals must be technologically literate to participate fully in a learning society. *A Nation at Risk* states that twenty-three million American adults are functionally illiterate. For millions of Americans who have been left out or pushed out of formal education, the public library offers an optional, informal route to advancement. The library provides materials and programs that deal with both practical and cultural concerns, ranging from health information to modern philosophy. Literacy programs, materials for persons who are blind or disabled, and services for persons with limited proficiency in English help people of all ages. Library programs in correctional facilities, hospitals, nursing homes, and other institutions help residents understand themselves and gain a view of the outside world. Library programs also can contribute to the future productivity of those persons who return to the larger society.

The extent and quality of library resources and services vary greatly from community to community. In Colorado Springs, the public library extends services directly into more than a thousand homes equipped with microcomputers. In other communities the public library lacks a telephone. Some libraries offer services in modern, well-equipped new buildings. Others are housed in crowded, deteriorating buildings designed and built for an earlier age. Cooperation between libraries and literacy volunteers provides service for thousands of new readers, but demand exceeds capacity and many wait months to participate. Some libraries offer valuable assistance to users in developing research and study skills, while in other libraries service is minimal.

New technologies offer opportunities for solving such problems as the disintegration of books, documents, and films, and for sharing of information resources through computers. Libraries can cooperate to share resources if there is wise planning at local, state, and regional levels. This planning and cooperation depends upon the continuous collection and compilation of library statistics and other information by agencies of the states and the federal government. Sharing of library resources now is limited by inadequate staff, materials, and investments in technology. Constraints on sharing of services and of preserving valuable materials handicap us all.

To enable libraries to respond to these needs, public officials should:

- Fund public libraries so they can be easily accessible to all people and have the materials, staff, and buildings needed by people of all ages and all levels of schooling, whatever their interests or disabilities may be.
- Ensure that public library services are available without charge and without violation of the reader's right to privacy.
- Expand support for literacy training programs for adults.
- Appropriate state and federal aid (which is often extended by private sector grants) to provide microcomputers in every public, academic, and school library as part of integrated, comprehensive programs of technologically sound library service.
- Expand support for libraries and library services in hospitals, nursing homes, correctional facilities, and other institutions.
- Target funds for the preservation and conservation of research resources needed by present and future generations.
- Expect teachers to help their students become better library users. Demand that every academic and school library has bibliographic, library use, and study skills instruction as an integral part of the institution's curriculum.

Reality #4: Public Support of Libraries Is an Investment in People and Communities

A democratic society depends upon the informed participation of its people. State and federal governments must ensure the right of all citizens to get information and resources for continued learning. Library services are important to the economy, the quality of life, the educational and intellectual activities, and the governments of our communities, our states, and our nation.

It is no coincidence that we are both a high technological society and a learning society. Information fuels economic development. Research and development depend upon access to information in many formats and locations. Few corporations can be self-sufficient in generating the information they need for development, but through their library staffs they can join in networks with other cooperating libraries and become both recipients and sharers of information. Libraries also provide men and women with the education and information they need to attain and hold jobs. Throughout their lives they can use library materials to improve and update their employment skills.

Library services also are important for sound government and the quality of community life. The library is objective in providing and stimulating a variety of opinions. It offers facts which stimulate ideas and ideas which encourage the public to discover new facts. In many communities the public library is the single cultural institution available to all people, irrespective of age, social condition, or educational attainment.

University, school, and public libraries are essential parts of our society's infrastructure. They support the work of scientists, professionals, and others engaged in research important for us all. The scholars who write texts for students need library resources to develop the ideas they wish to communicate. The atmosphere of open discussion which permeates many libraries provides people with space, opportunity, and time to present and test their ideas before the community.

Libraries share resources through the use of such new technologies as computerized databases and telecommunications. Escalating costs of telecommunications, however, are threatening the abilities of libraries to offer these benefits. Lower rates for library telecommunications are needed, following the pattern of United States library postal rates.

Actions

The stake that we Americans have in our libraries matches today's public concern about education. *A Nation at Risk* and other reports have focused the nation's attention upon the imperative for educational reform. The four realities we have outlined make the following actions essential:

1. **State aid for public libraries must be increased so that library services are available to all people in the learning society.**
2. **State support for resource sharing must be increased, and additional aid must be provided to school and academic libraries to enable them to meet basic service needs and participate effectively in resource sharing.**
3. **Federal funds for library services must be increased through new initiatives in aid for elementary and secondary school libraries and through appropriations for the federal Library Services and Construction Act and the several library programs in the Higher Education Act.**
4. **Federal responsibilities for library statistical data and planning information must be assumed by the National Center for Education Statistics in cooperation with the state library agencies, state departments of education, and national organizations.**
5. **Local, state, and federal agencies developing human services and education programs—such as those concerned with the aging, public television, literacy improvement, day care centers, and the arts and humanities—should strengthen their programs by including librarians and libraries in their planning and program development.**
6. **Librarians, library boards, friends of libraries, parents, and educators should consider the recommendations which resulted from the *Libraries and the Learning Society* seminars sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, and they should implement those which are needed to reshape and improve library services.**

Public response to *A Nation at Risk* indicates a nationwide concern and readiness for action to improve education. Within the last year more than half the state legislatures have increased state aid for schools, and over half have raised high school graduation requirements. States and communities have established uncounted commissions, committees, and task forces to examine and improve their schools. Attention to elementary and secondary schools constitutes an important beginning. With few exceptions, recognition of the value of libraries is missing from these educational reform efforts. Now it is essential to recognize these four realities of educational reform and act on them.

Prepared by the American Library Association Task Force on Excellence in Education.

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The American Library Association is the oldest and largest library association in the world. Its nearly 40,000 members represent all types of libraries—state, public, school and academic, and special libraries serving persons in government, commerce, armed services, hospitals, prisons, and other institutions. The association is the chief advocate for the people of the United States to achieve and maintain high quality library and information services—by protecting the right to read, educating librarians, improving library services, and making information accessible to everyone.

In August, 1983, Brooke E. Sheldon, president of the American Library Association, appointed a task force to examine *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* in relation to ALA's goals and objectives and to develop creative strategies for the involvement of ALA and America's libraries in the reform of education.

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The American Library Association

To ensure that libraries serve us all effectively, public officials should:

- **Appropriate funds for library services targeted toward individual and community needs for job information, literacy, and development as well as toward more general needs of library users.**
- **Demand excellence in their academic, institution, public, school, and special libraries.**
- **Supply each state library agency with the funds and staff needed to work with public officials and libraries of all types in planning services and sharing resources.**
- **Mandate that state and federal government documents and the products of government-sponsored research are available to all through library networks.**
- **Institute a library rate for telecommunications.**
- **Convene state and national conferences of library users, librarians, library policy makers, and public officials to assess the capacity of our libraries to serve the learning society, to measure the change which has taken place since the 1979 White House Conference on Library and Information Services, to encourage sound, long range, community-based planning for library services, and to initiate local, state and federal action to improve library services.**